

KARO-ECHO Membership Meeting

April 13, 2020
via Zoom and 146.415

Attendees

NI6A	Don Simon
KJ6AAT	David Swanson
KE6BEE	Howdy Goudey
KN6BUY	Tom Fattaruso
KN6BVF	David Naisuler
KN6CMP	Blake Yeaman
KN6CMR	Susan Yeaman
KN6EIH	Dakota McKenzie
AI6GD	Sam Freeman
KK6GIO	Larry Vanselow
KE6HCE	Armando Picciotto
K6KOP	Jerry Michaels
KK6NDF	Hal Graboske
KC6OBK	Marian Gade
KC2OKI	Jon "Hammond" Heda
KK6RED	Diane Richwine
KJ6RHF	Jeff Miller
K6RJM	Rob McNicholas
KJ6SWK	Annette McCoubrey
KM6TCB	Dave Roth
KM6UBY	Edward Carney
KM6UCF	Natalie DeJarlais
KJ6WSS	Jay Fenton
KK6ZPM	Karen Leong Fenton

Minutes

After corrections requested by Don were implemented to the March 2020 minutes, Don moved to approve the March meeting minutes. David S seconded, and all approved.

Check-in was conducted via radio, with Zoom chat backup. Welcome to new attendee Dakota, KN6EIH.

Greater Community Engagement in Radio Communications: Proposed FRS/GMRS Net

Hal reported on the April 8 executive board meeting last week, where the focus was on how to communicate effectively and carry out the mission of KE in case of disaster. He discussed

three specific scenarios:

- Geographically specific shelter in place orders
- Generalized shelter in place orders
- Evacuation

Radio communications are common to all three types of disaster. To connect more broadly, we need to engage additional neighborhood responses.

Howdy discussed the possibility of a neighborhood local FRS/GMRS net on Thursdays prior to 7:00, when the KE net begins. Neighborhoods could check-in, with KE members serving as hubs where there is no CERT AC. In response to Sam's question regarding whether Albany would be included, Howdy stated that anyone in the area would be welcome to join the net, and it would be beneficial for the various neighborhood nets to know which areas they are able to connect with. We could experiment with various connections each week.

In response to concerns about cross-jurisdictional communication and EOCs, Howdy and Hal stated that this would be more about mutual aid and communicating across a broader area to be aware of circumstances in an emergency, such as evacuations.

Don expressed concern about the viability of a community communications plan if CERT will not be involved, as the radio operator interface depends on neighbors. We already have the communicators, but in most areas no organized structure within the neighborhoods to communicate for. Howdy explained that there are a number of people who have indicated an interest in radio, and it might build by word of mouth even with little or no CERT involvement.

Don mentioned that in EC9 there are three new block captains in three separate, but neighboring, neighborhoods now equipped with FRS/GMRS radios. EC9 held an FRS/GMRS zoom meeting and radio net headed up by EC9 Area Coordinator, Mike, KM6CXI. EC9 is planning on having a monthly GMRS/FRS net as soon as new radios arrive. We recommended them to check-in to Karen's GMRS/FRS net on channel 15 on the first Wednesday of each month at 11 AM. In order to avoid interference with neighboring GMRS/FRS areas, a frequency coordination policy should be implemented, which depends upon cooperation between each area's CERT coordinator.

Dakota stated that pockets of Kensington could benefit from radio communications during an evacuation. Hal discussed the upcoming computer-modeled disaster response system called Hal described, how Zone Haven (an east coast corporation) has contracted with Lamorinda to design an ordered zone by zone evacuation system, which is completely separate from CERT areas. Chief Grupalo is putting this together for El Cerrito, and there is currently no role for radio in that system nor CERT. Nonetheless, he anticipates that we can use our radios to understand what's going on during an evacuation.

Karen mentioned that there were 28 radio operators and 4 "eavesdroppers" at the April 1 FRS/GMRS exercise. They're emphasizing that anyone can listen in without an FCC license.

The organizers asked for reports of what people heard from Don's transmission. If an FRS operator is calling out in distress, a ham or GMRS could transmit the information.

Sam, who was involved with Rebecca's East Bay CERT group that tried to bring in all the CERTs, observed that the proposed net might be duplicative of the cross-county net that Rebecca is doing.

Don confirmed that Rebecca is doing excellent work (see: <https://eastbayresilience.groups.io/g/main/topics>), but she is depending on pre-existing FRS/GMRS nets like Richmond's existing radio groups (DJ's North and East at Burg Park, Karen's monthly GMRS/FRS Net, and David and Diane's Ready to React Wednesday evening FRS/GMRS nets. In addition, Berkeley (BECERTAINN) and other East Bay cities have their own FRS/GMRS EMcomm nets; so far El Cerrito/Kensington has none. What is needed is to focus on local neighborhood groups first, establish FRS/GMRS liaison with them to an ICP/HUB on GMRS, and then let the hams do the inter-neighborhood and EOC liaison. As a future possibility It is also probable that if enough GMRS operators in each Area/ICP had gain antennas, they could cooperate for mutual aid among each other without needing ham radio.

Hal stated that there are three related issues here:

- Get a KE ham group to create a net to connect neighborhoods via communications systems/radio hubs in each area. These would be Area Communication Hubs and where an existing emergency response group (CERT for example) exists - they could adopt that hub
- Develop local neighborhood nets using FRS/GMRS that function independently of CERT, as exemplified by Richmond (multiple FRS nets existing) EC9 in El Cerrito and the BECERTAINN organization in Berkeley.
- Have the Area communication hubs work to coordinate in their area the neighborhood net/nets.

Repeater Usage

Karen stated that it could be helpful to use repeaters for KE meetings. Several concerns were expressed, however: While repeaters are convenient when they work, we have to assume simplex during disasters. Simplex still makes sense, given the limited repeater resources. Don explained that in a disaster, we may only have radio to radio simplex capability. Not only can repeaters go down due to power, but there are also hardware and software issues that can take them down and they're not completely reliable. If you practice on a repeater and become accustomed to its use, then people are not trained in simplex operation and relay. We want to be as self-reliant as possible, and that requires simplex. Marian confirmed this analysis.

Don also mentioned that repeaters could be considered a backup, though not primary. If the repeater is operating, and two stations have trouble, it would be good for operators to know how to use repeaters. Even from the Arlington clubhouse, though, he can't hit the 4Cs repeater. It's fine to use repeaters as long as we don't become dependent upon them.

Repeaters break down because of complicated mechano-electronic reasons, not just because of power outages. Hence, they are more fragile.

There was some discussion of whether two hours on a repeater is too heavy a load; Jay mentioned that the morning over-the-hill net on the repeater has been running over an hour and hasn't tripped out.

Net Control Class

Howdy thanked Diane and David for their excellent Net Control class last Saturday. There is a recording of the meeting; the link is online and in the latest newsletter. David commented that while the class ran a bit long, it went well. Diane agreed and stated that the turnout showed how many interested radio operators in the area. 44 showed up for the online Zoom class, with nine KE members among them.

Meetings During Shelter-in-Place

Hal requested feedback on the radio/Zoom experiment and whether we want to continue this method while we're sheltering in place. The response was generally positive, though Rob requested additional volunteers to run the Zoom meeting, which requires monitoring the chat window among other things. Natalie also mentioned that note-taking is more difficult when transmissions are unclear.

The meeting was adjourned.